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Human rights situations that require the Council's attention

Written statement* submitted by the Organization for Defending Victims of Violence, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[23 May 2015]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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Saudi Arabia's Human Rights Situation

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is consistently ranking among the "worst of the worst" in Freedom House's annual survey of political and civil rights.[1] Not only the new king, Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, has not been trying to take the first steps towards stopping the human rights abuses, but rather, with the same unfair and illegal policies he has been continuing the systematic violations of human rights both nationally and internationally in 2015. At the domestic level, the most important human rights problems reported include (but not limited to) citizens' lack of the universal rights such as freedom of expression and belief. In addition, women and religious minorities are still greatly suffering from discriminations taking place against them on a daily bases. In the past few years Saudi Arabia went even further to violate the sovereignty of the States (i.e., Bahrain and Yemen) which resulted in the death of hundreds of civilians, innocent women and children. International community has so far failed to enact effective measures in order to protect the rights and freedom of these groups.

Domestic Violations of Human Rights

It's been a long time that despite the recommendations and legal requests of both international organizations and NGOs to stop the human rights abuses in Saudi Arabia, the basic rights and freedom of women and minority groups are still being violated today. It is quite ironic that, neither relative international bodies nor human rights advocating States, appointed a country special rapporteur for Saudi Arabia, posed sanctions or any other punishment for that matter, which resulted to the country's continuation of human rights violations with impunity.

The country's government is known for its strict gender inequalities, as women may not legally drive cars, their use of public facilities is restricted, and they cannot travel within or outside of the country without a male relative. Education and economic rights for Saudi women have improved, and now more than half of the country's university students are females, however, due to the existing restrictions, woman makeup only 5% of the workforce in Saudi.[2]

With respect to the minority groups, religious practices of the Shiite and Sufi Muslim minority sects are extremely limited in Saudi Arabia. The least of the violations can be banning the building of Shiite mosque and not allowing them to practice or pray in public; and the most is the spite expressed by the known cleric, Adel Al Kalbani, in May 2009 declaring that all Shia Muslims were apostate, u believers, and as such should be killed. Considering that Al Kalbani was appointed to his position by the King hir lt, it seems that the cleric was expressing the state's position against all Shia Muslims, whether within or outside tl borders of the Kingdom. Al Kalbani suggested that all Saudi Shia should be forced to leave the Kingdom.[3]

According to Human Rights Watch report, Shia citizens in Saudi Arabia "face systematic discrimination in religion, education, justice, and employment".[4] Furthermore, the recent decision of the Saudi on beheading and publicly displaying the headless body of Sheikh Nimr Baqir al-Nimr, internationally respected Shia cleric, by the Specialized

[1] House, Freedom. *The Worst of the Worst: The World's Most Repressive Societies 2008*. Freedom House, 2007. Retrieved: http://web.archive.org/web/20101122180016/http://freedomhouse.org/uploads/special_report/88.pdf

[2] *Ibid*, pg. 17.

[3] Shakdam, Catherin. "Saudi Arabia's Escalating Campaign against Shia Muslims". *International Policy Digest*. 2014. Retrieved: http://www.internationalpolicydigest.org/2014/05/26/saudi-arabias-escalating-campaign-shia-muslims/

[4] Nasr, Vali, *The Shia Revival* (W.W. Norton & Company, New York, 2006) p. 84

Criminal Court for 'seeking foreign meddling' and 'disobeying' its rulers and taking up arms against the security forces[5] speaks to the clear existing infraction of freedom of speech and belief in Saudi Arabia.

As a result of the lack of providing a reasonable protection for the religious minorities in Saudi Arabia, a suicide bombing of a Shiite mosque in eastern Saudi Arabia took place on May 22th which caused the death of at least 19 people including children, a move that could represent a significant escalation of the extremist group's operations in the kingdom. Saudi Shiites are concerned that the attack represents a backlash for Saudi Arabia's military campaign against rebel (Shiite) Houthis in Yemen.[6]

International Violations of Human Rights

In the past few years, Saudi authorities have developed a habit of 'helping' people in Middle East by suppressing the oppositions of States. The intervention of Saudi in Bahrain during the Arab-Spring and in Yemen civil conflict today, are two examples of that. The great number of civilian casualties as a result of Saudi's attacks on these sovereign states in the past few years can never be justified by their 'Collateral Damage' argument. On March 2015, Saudi-led bombing campaign began. More than half of the victims have been reported to be civilian women and children. The U.N. and several major human rights groups have raised the possibility of war crimes in the scores of documented bombings so far. It is important to note that the U.S. has played a key role in the campaign, expediting weapons shipments and providing intelligence to Saudi Arabia. The dropped cluster bombs which contain dozens of smaller munitions designed to fan out over a wide area were manufactured and supplied by the United States. It should be mentioned that the use of cluster bombs are illegal under a 2008 treaty for the high civilian toll they can cause, and yet they were used anyway.[7]

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[5] ''Saudi Shia cleric Nimr al-Nimr 'sentenced to death''. *BBC News*. 2015. Retrieved: http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-29627766

[6] Fadel, Leila. '' Self-Declared Islamic State Claims Responsibility For Saudi Mosque Attack''. May 2015. *NPR*. Retrieved: http://www.npr.org/2015/05/22/408827444/self-declared-islamic-state-claims-responsibility-for-saudi-mosque-attack

[7] Brumfield, B & Shelbayah,S. Report: ''Saudi Arabia used U.S.-supplied cluster bombs in Yemen''. *CNN*. May 2015. Retrieved: http://edition.cnn.com/2015/05/03/middleeast/yemen-hrw-cluster-munitions-saudi-arabia/